



RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

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*Excerpts: 'CULTURE AND POLITICAL
HISTORY OF KASHMIR': Volume 2 - by
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While the fascinating valley of Kashmir was yet under the rule of the Hindu Lohara dynasty and Kalhana was giving his final touches to his monumental history, the Rajatarangini, North-West India was witnessing the end of an era. The old order was changing rapidly with the advent of Muhammadan rule. Though the Islamic movement was of relatively recent growth, it was yet powerfully forcing itself on the ancient and firmly established social and religious institutions of the country. There was "a clashing of fundamental convictions, a conflict of realism with idealism, of the material with the visionary, of the concrete with the abstract." New values were being set up in art and literature and a chain of action and reaction resulted in a slow and imperceptible synthesis of the two fundamentally opposite cultures.

Spread of Islam

Perhaps the best example of this synthesis is provided by medieval Kashmir which, as mentioned earlier, came under the influence of the new religion peacefully and was spared the violent birthpangs that ushered in the new order in the rest of the country. For over two centuries following Mahmud Ghazni's expeditions to north and west of India, Kashmir sealed itself up behind its mountain ramparts, secure against the attacks of the zealous armies of Mohammadan invaders. But cultural influences and ideas could not be shut out, howsoever high the enclosing walls might be. Islamic missionaries and adventurers carried the teachings of the new religion into the Valley. Most of these missionaries belonged to one or the other of the Order of Sufis from Persia and Bukhara. How these saints and their teachings influenced the already rich cultural heritage of Kashmir will be clear from a reference to the development of Sufism and its propagation in the Valley by devoted and selfless missionaries.

Islamic Mystics

Islam on coming into contact with Mahayana Buddhism in Central Asia and in some parts of Persia, could not but be influenced by its philosophic thought, and the devotion and ardour of its monks. The religious tolerance and harmlessness to all life as taught by its scriptures had a moderating effect on a good proportion of the followers of the new faith. It was, therefore, a matter of time when in the process of the synthesis of the two religions, there should evolve a new school of Islamic mystics - the Sufis.

By the end of the ninth century, Islam had begun to ossify itself into a system of formulas and

observances and Sufism appeared as a reaction of the spirit against the letter. There was felt a need for a 'heart' religion and the Brahmanic Pantheism and Buddhistic Nihilism alike teaching the unreality of the seeming world, attracted the attention of the Sub doctors, although their mysticism is less intense and practical but more airy and literary in character.

Mysticism, therefore, made great progress in Persia and assumed the character of a sect there. A certain Abu Sayyid was the first who advised his disciples to forsake the world and embrace a monastic life in order to devote themselves exclusively to meditation and contemplation; a practice borrowed from the Hindu and Buddhist religions. The disciples of Abu Sayyid wore a garment of wool (suf) whence they received the name of Sufis.

Sufism spread more and more in Persia, the home of a people imbibed with the teachings of various Asiatic religions and was enthusiastically embraced by those who wished to give themselves up undisturbed to philosophical speculation. In its first form Sufism was quite compatible with Muslim dogma. It was satisfied to profess a contempt for life and an exclusive love of God, and to extol ascetic practices, as the fittest means of procuring those states of ecstasy during which the soul was supposed to contemplate the Supreme being face to face. But by degrees, thanks to the adepts whom it drew from the ranks of heterodoxy, Sufism departed from its original purpose and entered upon discussions respecting the Divine nature which finally led to Pantheism. The increasing tendency towards Pantheism and ascetic practices are thus the main scope of Sufism. The former was the result of contacts and discussions with the followers of Hindu philosophy and the latter was borrowed from

Buddhist monkery in Central Asia. "The great movement of mysticism, in spite of the Greek and Indian origin of much of its philosophical skeleton and terminology, is the most significant genuinely Islamic contribution to the religious experience of mankind."

Its principal argument was that God being one, the creation must make a part of His being, since otherwise it would exist externally to Him and would form a principal distinct from Him, which would be equal to looking on the universe as a deity opposed to God. In their view, God is immanent in all things and is the essence of every human soul. There is not only no God but God, but no being, life or spirit except the being, life and spirit of God. These doctrines shocked the orthodox Muslim opinion and in the reign of Moktadir, a Persian Sufi named Haltaj, who taught publicly that every man is God, was tortured and put to death.

Several of the chief dervish orders took their birth from various accomplished Sufis - Abdul-al-Jilani, who founded the Qadiryah Order; Ahmad-ul-Rifai, the Rifaiyah; Jalal-ud-din Rumi, the Mawaliyah; etc. Rumi who was the most uncompromising Sufi was the greatest Pantheistic writer of all ages. Of the later Order may be named the Naqshbandiyah, which has been the most important in the Khanates of Turkistan.

There were too among the Naqshbandiyah exercises in the restraint of breathing, strongly reminiscent of the yoga exercises of the Hindus. There is much in common between the Saiva philosophy and Sufism. The cardinal doctrine of Sufis that all forms of religion are equal appealed to intellectuals of the age.

Sayyid Bulbs Shah

It was thus fortunate that Islam entered Kashmir from Central Asia, the land which owed so much to Kashmir in the realm of art and philosophy. The first name associated with the propagation of the new faith of whom we find a record in the annals of Kashmir, was Bulbul Shah. He appears to have deeply impressed the people by his personal example, his methods of preaching and persuasion, at a time when the fortunes of the ruling dynasty were in the melting pot and the people were passing through a period of political instability, heavy taxation, and crushing burdens of feudalism. Above all, he was responsible of initiating the new ruler into the fold of Islam and thus elevating it to the status of State religion.

Bulbul Shah or Sayyid Bilal Shah is said to have visited Kashmir first in the time of King Sahadeva, the predecessor of Rinchin. He was a widely travelled Musavi Sayyid from Turkistan, and was a "disciple of Shah Niamatullah Wali Farsi, Khalifa of the Suhrawardi Tariq or school of Sufis founded originally by Sheikh Shihab-ud-din Suhrawardi. The circumstances which led to the conversion of Rinchin to Islam have already been mentioned. Suffice it to say here that with this first success of his mission, Bulbul Shah acquired great influence in the Valley and very soon he effected the conversion of Rinchin's brother-in-law and commander-in-chief and several others to his creed. The first mosque was built at the place now called Bulbul Lankar, below the fifth bridge in Srinagar. Bulbul Shah died in 1327 AD and lies buried near the mosque. His lieutenant, Mulla Ahmed, carried on the mission till his death in the reign of Sultan Shihab-ud-din and is buried near the grave of his

preceptor. The Mulla was made the first Sheikh-ul-Islam and is the author of two books, Fataw-i-Shihabi and Shihab-i-Saqib.

Sayyid Ali Hamadani

After Bulbul Shah came other Sufis, like Sayyid Jalal-ud-din of Bukhara; and Sayyid Taj-ud-din who arrived in the reign of Sultan Shihab-ud-din (1354-73 AD) and was accompanied by Sayyid Mas'ud and Sayyid Yusuf, his disciples. But the most prominent among the Sufi missionaries was Sayyid Ali Hamadani who "by his learning, piety and devotion is said to have made 37,000 converts to Islam." Known in Kashmir as Shah Hamadan he may well be said to have practically established Islam in Kashmir and laid its foundations well and true.

The great Sayyid, also known as Amir-i-Kabir or the great Amir was born at Hamadan in 1314 A.D. His genealogy can be traced to Hazrat Ali through Imam Husain. Born in a family with traditions of scholarship and piety, Sayyid Ali learnt the holy Quran by heart while in his teens. He studied Islamic theology and learnt the secrets of Sufi doctrines and practices under the tuition of his learned uncle, Sayyid Alau-ud-din Simnani. Later he became the spiritual disciple of Sheikh Sharaf-ud-din Muzdaqani who advised him to complete his education by extensive travels in foreign countries. For 21 years Sayyid Ali journeyed from one country to the other and came in contact with contemporary scholars and saints of note. When he returned in 1370 AD he found that the political conditions in Persia had undergone a change during his absence and Timur who ruled Persia had unleashed a policy of repression against the

Sayyids, forcing most of them out of the country. Sayyid Ali Hamadani accompanied by 700 more Sayyids, left Persia to escape the tyrannical rule of Timur and entered Kashmir in 1372 AD. Sultan Shihab-ud-din was the reigning king. The Sultan was at that time on one of his military expeditions against the ruler of Kabul and his brother, Qutb-ud-din had the honour of receiving the party of Sayyids and waiting upon them for four months, after which they left on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Seven years later (in 1379) Shah Hamadan again visited the Valley and stayed there for over two and a half years. He paid a third visit to Kashmir in 1387, but had to leave early on account of ill-health. While at Pakhli in Hazara district, he had a relapse and passed away in 1384. His disciples carried the dead body to Khutlan where it lies buried. A monument to the Sayyid stands at Pakhli, of which, writes Babar in his Diary, "I made the circuit (tawaf) when I came and took Chaghan-Sarai in 920 AH (1514 AD)".

Sayyid Ali Hamadani was a versatile genius, a great saint and a scholar. He wrote profusely on Sufism and elucidated several earlier works on the subject. Although a great authority on theology and philosophy, he did not disdain to write on such varied secular subjects as jurisprudence, political science and the science of physiognomy. Author of more than a hundred works on logic, ethics, and other subjects in prose, Sayyid Ali also wrote Persian poetry of no mean order. His odes are naturally Sufistic and his mystical poems illustrate his broad humanistic outlook on life and religion.

Sayyid Ali's visits to Kashmir, particularly the one in 1372 when he was accompanied by 700 Sayyids who had to leave Persia following Timur's invasion

of that country and his decision to exterminate the Alavi Sayyids of Hamadan, had a profound influence on the spread of Islam in the Valley. A leader of the great Naqshbandya Order of Sufis, founded by his contemporary Khwaja Muhammad Bahau-u-din Naqshband (1319-89) of Bukhara, Sayyid Ali Hamadani obtained great influence over the ruler, Sultan Qutb-ud-din. He was received with great warmth and respect and lodged along with his followers in a hospice in the Alaudinpura quarter of Srinagar. Some of his learned followers visited the remote corners of the Valley and by their religious discourses effected the conversion of a large number of people to Islam.

Till then the new religion had not made any appreciable headway in the Valley, even though the Sultans had been its followers. The majority of the people being still Hindu, the Muslims had nothing to distinguish them in dress, manners and customs from their compatriots. In Alaudinpura, for instance there was a temple which was visited every morning both by the Sultan and his Muslim subjects. To avert the recurrence of famines "the king performed a Yagna in the month of Bhadra, and distributed large gifts." In contravention of the Islamic teachings he had two wives who were sisters. Sayyid Ali disapproved of these practices and in accordance with his advice, Qutb-ud-din divorced one of the sisters and retained the other. He also advised the Sultan to adopt the dress common in Muslim countries. However, "anxious not to antagonise his non-Muslim subjects, Qutbud-din did not follow every advice of the Sayyid, but he held him in great reverence and visited him every day. Sayyid Ali gave him a cap which, out of respect, the Sultan always wore under his crown. The subsequent Sultans followed the same practice

until the cap was buried along with the body of Fateh Shah according to the latter's will."

That Sayyid Ali Hamadani's deep scholarship and his spiritual attainments were responsible for the furtherance of the conversion of the Valley to Islam, goes without saying. He came in contact with the popular Saiva teacher Lalleswari and the great Sufi Saint Sheikh Nur-ud-din, and had long discourses with them on spiritual and philosophic subjects. Lallewari's association with Shah Hamadan was due to an identity of the faith of Sufis and Hindu mendicants and saints in Kashmir. The Sufis had charm of manners and attractive personalities and treating all religions alike they naturally preferred the faith to which they themselves belonged and which their patrons favoured. It was, therefore, natural that they should have influenced the people among whom they lived and worked and thus facilitated the peaceful propagation of Islam among the people in Kashmir.

Mir Muhammad Hamadani

Sayyid Ali Hamadani's work was continued with greater vigour by his disciples and more particularly by Mir Muhammad Hamadani. Born in 1372, Mir Muhammad was only 12 years old at the time of his father's death, and his education in theology and Sufism was conducted under the prominent admirers and followers of his father - Khwaja Ishaq of Khutlan and Maulana Nur-ud-din Jafar of Badakhshan. He soon attained preeminence as a scholar and saint and arrived in Kashmir with 300 Sayyids when only 22 years of age. This influx of a large number of Sayyids into Kashmir was no doubt the direct result of the tyranny and self-assertion of first the Mongols and then of Timur. "They were

attracted to the Valley owing to the peace that prevailed there compared to the social and political upheavals that were characteristic of Central Asia and Persia during this period. Moreover; they also came on account of the patronage that was extended to them by the Sultans."

Mir Muhammad stayed in the Valley for about 22 years and then left to perform the Hadj pilgrimage. The presence of a large number of Sayyids, imbued deeply with the Sufistic doctrines and practices stimulated the tendency to mysticism among Kashmiris for which Saivism and Buddhism had already laid a foundation. This was mainly responsible for not only the adoption of Muslim faith by the general mass of people, but moulding their character and outlook on life on a humanistic and tolerant plane.

But not all the Sayyids who entered Kashmir during this time were devout Sufis. Many of them upheld the orthodox and puritanic views on Islam. In order to gain favours and privileges from the Sultans, they actively interfered with the politics of the State. This culminated in the narrow-minded religious policies adopted by Sultan Sikandar and his minister, Malik Suha Bhatt, who embraced Islam at the hands of Mir Hamadani. In contrast to the peaceful propagation of Islam by the earlier Sufis, throughout example and precept, Malik Suha Bhatt, with the active support of Sultan Sikandar, indulged in forcible conversion of Brahmins and wholesale destruction of their temples. A strong reaction during the reign of Sultan Zain-ul-abidin against this policy resulted in the proclamation of complete freedom of conscience and tolerance to all beliefs.

But the mode of conversion adopted by Suha Bhatt and Sikandar naturally brought about its own revenge, and reacted on their concept of Islam. The converts, and through them their leaders, were unable to resist the Hindu philosophy and trend of thought. This resulted in the emergence of a remarkable School or Order of Sufis in Kashmir - the Rishis - who wielded enormous influence on the religious and philosophical beliefs of the people, and moulded their mind and set up the ideal of religious tolerance and abiding faith in the grace of God.

Sheikh Nur-ud-din alias Nand Rishi

Foremost among them was Sheikh Nur-ud-din, the patron-saint of Kashmir. Revered alike by the Hindus and Muslims of Kashmir, Sheikh Nur-ud-din alias Nand Rishi, or Sahazanand, was born in 1377 AD at Kaimah, a village two miles to the west of the important town of Bijbihara (ancient Vijayesa), 26 miles from Srinagar on the Jammu road. His ancestors belonged to a noble family of Kishtwar and had emigrated to the valley. His father, Salar Sanz, was a pious man and came under the spiritual influence of a Sufi saint, Yasman Rishi, who arranged his marriage to Sadra Maji. The child of their union was Nand Rishi, the great founder of the Order of the Rishis of Kashmir.

In his very childhood Nand Rishi gave proof of his saintly nature. He held himself aloof from the daily affairs of the family and though apprenticed to several trades, showed no inclination for any of them. Finally he gave up the world, lived in a cave for 12 years practicing penances which reduced him almost to a skeleton. His fame as a saint and the glory of his spiritual attainments travelled far and

wide, attracting to him a great number of followers. Though unable to read and write, he gave utterance to hundreds of beautiful Sayings which furnish the Kashmiri literature with gems having both a terrestrial as well as celestial meaning. Concise, and objective in their approach, they have been stamped in people's memories. They are collected and preserved in two volumes called the Rishi Nama and Nur Nama; but because of the transliteration in the Persian alphabet, many of them are not easily deciphered.

Nand Rishi exhorted his followers to perform good actions. That he said, was the secret of happiness in this world as well as in the life to come;

*The dog is barking in the compound,
O Brothers! give ear and listen to
(what he says):
"As one sowed, so did he reap;
Thou, Nand, sow, sow, sow !"*

Of his experiences in a lonely cave where he led an austere life, he says:

*The cave seems to me to be a celestial
castle;
The quilt seems to me to be a silken
garment.
I play with the rats as if they were
creatures of good omen to me.
One year seems to me to be one single
hour.*

He preached that all men should lead disciplined lives and none should fall a prey to worldly desires:

*Desire is like the knotted wood of the forest,
It cannot be made into planks, beams
or into cradles;
He who cut and felled it,
Will burn it into ashes.*

Religious schisms were raising their head in his time and Nand Rishi warns the Kashmiris against the snares of false prophets in the following terms:

*I saw a priest blowing out fire (and)
Beating a drum to others:
The priests have nice big turbans on
their heads;
They walk about daintily dressed.
Dressed in priestly robes they indulge
in mutton,
They run away with cooking pots under
their arms.*

He ridicules the pretentious nature of a priest, addressing him thus:

*The rosary is like a snake;
Thou bendest it on seeing the disciples;

Thou hast eaten six platefuls, one like
another;*

*If thou art a priest then who are
robbers.*

Nand Rishi also left what might be called a note on the state of the world to come:

*During this Iron Age I found liars
prospering;
In the house of the pious I found grief
born of poverty.*

He constantly advised the seeking of good company and shunning the bad, contrasting the two in forceful terms. He showed that rogues will always wrong the good, attacking them with dishonest words if one lacked in care and gave them such opportunities:

*Spend thy days with the good -
The shah-wulga (one of the best kinds
of rice) will get pounded,
Never go about with the wicked -*

*Do riot walk close to pots covered with
soot (else thou shalt get soiled.)*

He also held that devotion to God lay in leading a disciplined life. It availed men nothing to carry out the rites and rituals of religion in a cold and mechanical manner.

*Having washed thy face, thou host
called the believers to prayer;
How can I know, O Rishi, what thou
feelest in thy heart,
or what thy vows are for?
Thou host lived a life without seeing
(God);
Tell me to whom didst thou offer
prayer.
by thou listeneth to truth, thou oughtest
to subdue the five (senses)
If thou Iowereth only the fleshy body,
the fleshy body will not save thee;
If thou maketh union witli Siva,
Then only, O Rishi Mali, will prayer
avail thee.*

Of true worship he says:

*Do not go to Sheikh and priest and
Mullah;
Do not feed the cattle on arkhon
(poisonous) leaves;
Do not shut thyself up in mosques or
forests;
Enter shine own body with breath
controlled in communion with God.*

Sheikh Nur-ud-din acquired enormous influence over the people of Kashmir and when he passed away at an advanced age, King Zain-ul-Abidin himself was the chief mourner at his funeral. His grave at Tsrar Sharif is an object of pilgrimage, Kashmiris of all religions and communities flocking to it every year. The extent of the veneration in

which his memory has been cherished may be gauged from the fact that nearly four centuries after his death, Atta Muhammad Khan, an Afghan governor, in order to win the sympathy and support of the people of Kashmir, struck coins in the name of Sheikh Nur-ud-din. No other saint perhaps in human history has ever had coins struck in his honour.

The Order of Rishis of Kashmir

During his lifetime Nand Rishi founded an Order of Rishis, and it is noteworthy that this Order had members from amongst Hindus and Muslims and commanded the respect and homage of all Kashmiris, irrespective of their caste or creed. Janak Rishi of Aishmuqam, Rishi Mol of Anantnag, Bata Mol. Rishi Pir, Thagababa Sahib of Srinagar, belonged to the same Order. The political, social and economic travail and suffering through which the land had to pass, was considerably lightened by the comforting words and kind acts of these highly advanced souls. To them goes the credit of keeping the people firm to the ideals of love and toleration. They lived among the common people, shared their troubles and pains. No better tribute can be paid to them than that recorded by Abut Fazal:

"The most respectable people of Kashmir are the Rishis who, although they do not suffer themselves to be fettered by traditions, are doubtless true worshippers of God. They revile not any other sect and ask nothing of anyone; they plant the roads with fruit trees to furnish the traveller with refreshments; they abstain from flesh and have no intercourse with the other sex. There are two thousand of these Rishis in Kashmir."

Jehangir was also impressed with their piety and utter self-abnegation. In his *Memoirs* TUZK-I-JEHANGIRI he speaks of these Rishis as possessing simplicity and though not having religious knowledge or learning, being without presence. "They restrain the tongue of desire and the foot of seeking," continues he in his florid style," and eat no flesh. They have no wives, and always plant fruit-bearing trees in the fields so that men may benefit by them, themselves desiring no advantage."

Every district and village had its *Asthan* where a Rishi took his abode and practiced meditation. Their graves and relics are objects of respect and veneration to this day. The shrines attest to their founders' austerities and virtues. "Associated as they are with acts of piety and self-denial," observes Lawrence, "the *Ziarat* are pleasant places of meeting at fair time, and the natural beauty of their position and surroundings afford additional attraction. Noble brotherhood of venerable trees, of chinar, elms and poplar with its white bark and shimmer of silver leaves, gives a pleasant shade, and there is always some spring of water for the thirsty."

Mir Sham-ud-din-Iraqi

An event of great importance in the spread of Islam in Kashmir was the arrival in about 1492 AD of a preacher from Talish on the shores of the Caspian, named Shams-ud-din Iraqi, who described himself as the disciple of Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh of Khorasan. His father was a Musavi Sayyid and it appears that he was converted to Nurbakhshi beliefs early in his life. He entered the service of Sultan Hussain Mirza Baiqara (1469-1506) of Herat and

was sent by him as his envoy in 1481 to the court of Sultan Hassan Shah of Kashmir. For eight years he stayed in Kashmir and though prevented by the nature of his post to take an active part in the religious or political movements in Kashmir, nevertheless made a keen study of the people and their leaders. He even converted secretly two preachers to his faith, and having aroused suspicion among the orthodox Ulama, he was forced to leave Kashmir.

But it was in 1492 itself that he came back to Kashmir to carry on his religious mission.

Shams-ud-din, however, professed to be an orthodox Sunni like most of the inhabitants of the Valley, but the doctrine he preached was "conforming neither to the Sunni nor to the Shia creeds." The way that ultimately led to the preachings among, and converts from the people of Kashmir to the Shia sect, is the story of a constant struggle and strife among Sunnis and followers of Mir Shams-ud-din.

In fact, the Nurbakhshi movement was an offshoot of the Sufi cult prevailing in Persia, and its founder, Sayyid Muhammad Nur Bakhsh claimed to have seen the Divine Light and to have received the esoteric teachings of All through the Imam Jafar-i-Sadiq. Naturally the teachings of Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh had a tendency towards the Shia tenets, and Shams-ud-din Iraqi who was his follower reflected these while conducting his proselytizing mission in Kashmir. With his eloquence and learning, he soon succeeded in converting a number of people to the Nurbakhshi sect, the most important person being Musa Raina, a powerful noble, who gave him money to carry on

his work and also land at Zadibal, a suburb to the north of Srinagar, to build a Khanaqah on.

But in spite of the initial success, Mir Shams-uddin had to face great obstacles. His patron, Musa Raina, soon fell from power and the influential Sayyid noble, Muhammad Baihaqi, the chief minister of Sultan Muhammad Shah drove him out of the Valley to Baltistan. There he continued his missionary activities and converted nearly the whole population to the Shia creed. After sometime when Musa Raina returned to power, he was recalled by the latter to Srinagar. As long as his patron enjoyed power, Shams-ud-din had the fullest support and cooperation from the government in his activities and it was then that he converted the turbulent Chak tribe too, thus giving a religious character to the subsequent race for power between the Shahmir Sultans and the Chaks.

The first severe setback that the Nurbakhshis had was at the hands of Mirza Haider Dughlat. He was an orthodox Sunni and looked with disfavour on any departure from the letter of Islamic tradition or dogma. Besides it served his political ends to bring down his heavy hand on the Nurbakhshis and other Sufi sects, hoping thus to gain the support and goodwill of the orthodox Sunnis. He was thus able for some time to easily impose his rule and his Mughal officials on the people of the Valley. Writes he in great wrath and venom:

"At the present time in Kashmir, the Sufis have legitimized so many heresies that they know nothing of what is lawful or unlawful. They consider that piety and purity consist in night watching and abstinence in food. They are for ever interpreting information regarding either the future

or the past. They prostrate themselves before another and, together with such disgraceful acts observe the forty days (of retirement). In short nowhere else in such a band of heretics to be found. May the most High God defend all the people of Islam from such misfortune and calamities as this, and turn them all into the true path of righteousness....."

"Thanks be to God that at the present time no one in Kashmir dares openly profess this faith; but all deny it, and give themselves out as good Sunnis. They are aware of my severity towards them, and know that if any one of the sect appears, he will not escape the punishment of death."

But the spirit which animated the religious beliefs of Kashmir asserted itself soon and with the death of Mirza Haider Dughlat, several Sufi saints and Rishis carried on openly their activities all over the Valley. A noted saint who wielded a powerful influence on the masses was Sheikh Hamza Makhdum. Born in 1494 AD Sheikh Hamza studied under a well known scholar of his time, Baba Ismail Qubravi, whose school stood at the foot of the Hari Parbat hill.

Sheith Hamza was, however, forced by the Shia ruler, Ghazi Shah Chak to leave Srinagar. He established his seat in the village of Biru (about 20 miles from Srinagar on the road to Magam) and won a large number of disciples. In course of time he became unbearable, he blessed the mission of Baba Daud Khaki, his disciple, and Sheikh Yaqub Sarfi, the learned theologian and poet, to Akbar's court to induce him to annex Kashmir to his expanding empire.

Both Sheikh Hamza and Baba Daud Khaki were responsible for converting a large number of people to Islam and also in setting up mosques in the Valley. Sheikh Hamza dies in 1586 at an advanced age and lies buried on the south-eastern spur of the Hari Parbat hill in Srinagar. The tomb attracts large crowds who offer *Fatiha* to the Sheikh and some of his disciples who lie buried nearby.

Use of Force

It would, however, be wrong to assert that the spread of Islam in the Valley was throughout effected peacefully and without the use of force. Though the Valley had no conqueror like Mahmud, nor a warrior like Shihab-ud-din Ghorī, nor a general like Muhammad bin Qasim, it had yet religious zealots like Sultan Sikandar, Sultan All Shah, Mirza Haider Dughlat, Yaqub Shah Chak, Mughal governors Itqad Khan and Ibrahim Khan, and most of the Afghan rulers. A close and careful study of the history of medieval Kashmir, however, reveals that persecution of non-Muslims by these zealots was resented by the majority of their Muslim subjects, who used to give shelter and solace to their compatriots in trouble. The people were conscious of the fact that in most cases this policy was born of political exigencies of these rulers who were experiencing difficulties in their career, and it did not reflect their respect for, or devotion to, the faith they professed. That the various religious communities bore no ill-will to one another, is proved by the political unrest in Kashmir during the 15th century when all the people, Hindu and Muslim, combined to give a fight to the Sayyids who had come from Iran and Turan and established their settlements in the Valley. Likewise the cruelties perpetrated by the

Afghan rulers on Hindus to forcibly convert them to Islam, did not win them the sympathy or support of the Muslims of the Valley; instead they joined the Hindus in extending an invitation to Ranjit Singh to invade Kashmir and rid them of the tyrannical rule of the Afghans. Religious fanaticism and persecution of communities professing a creed other than the religion of the king, seems to have been the general trend in medieval times: witness, for example, the wholesale extirpation of Sayyids from Persia by Timur, the suppression of Sufis and Nurbakhshis in Kashmir by Mirza Haider Dughlat, and the constant feuds in Afghanistan between the Shia and Sunni sects. That the masses in Kashmir did not fall victim to this malady of the times is apparent from the tolerant reigns of Sultans like Qutb-ud-din, Zain-ul-Abidin, and Hussain Shah Chak.

Kashmir was the meeting place of two mighty traditions - the heart of India's monistic Wisdom-Religion, which was Kashmir Saivism, and Erfan, the "Wisdom of the Quran." The geographical situation of the Valley and the rich cultural heritage of its people were responsible for this unique development. In what manner the two religions acted and reacted on one another is an interesting study.

Hinduism

As mentioned earlier the Hindu religion ant society before the advent of Islam, had been affected by Buddhism. If Kashmir Saivism was responsible for the development of Mahayana Hinduism was no less influenced by the heterodox dogma of Buddhism and its denunciation of caste. The social fabric was thus loosened and man, undesirable

practices, like those of *Devadasi* and *sati*, became common. The religious beliefs were petrified into rigid Saiva rites and rituals conducted under the supervision of Brahmins. The tatters influence through their *parishads* or societies was being increasingly felt not only in religion but also in the policies of the State. Devaswamin the head of the Saiva sect, for instance, refused to admit Rinchin to the Hindu fold.

The Saiva cult became the predominant religion of the people and replaced the Vedic rites and rituals connected with birth, marriage and death of a Hindu. All the religious and philosophical books were in Sanskrit which, with the emergence of the popular Kashmiri language, became the domain of the privileged few, mostly of Brahmin caste. Since the latter also carried on the civil administration, there grew up slowly a stiff though silent opposition to this class among the general mass of the people. This was reflected in the bid for gaining popular support through the persecution of the Kayasthas and Brahmins by several Hindu kings.

No wonder the teachings of Islam as carried to Kashmir by the Sultans found a ready response from the general populace. By the time Shah Mir ascended the throne, there seems to have been a fairly strong Muslim community in Kashmir, and by the end of the 14th century the "adoption of Islam by the great mass of the population became an accomplished fact."

But the Brahmins did not actively oppose the expansion of Muslim influence in the Valley, since "the administration remained as before in the hands of the traditional official class, the Brahmins, for whom a change of religion presented no advantage

and who accordingly retained their inherited status, together with its literary traditions."

With the growing influence of Iranian and Turanian Sayyids at the Kashmir Court, and the consequent encouragement of Persian language by the Sultans, the Brahmins were faced with the prospect of losing their privileged position. But with their quick adaptability they switched over to the study of the Persian language and literature in which they soon outshone the Sayyids. They had, however, to suffer persecution at the hands of Sultans Sikandar and All Shah who adopted this policy at the bidding of the Sayyid nobles. Most of the temples were destroyed by Suha Bhatt the newly converted minister of Sikandar and he," with the leaders of the army, tried to destroy the caste of the people." The Brahmins resisted forcible conversion by death, by flight to places in the rest of India, more particularly to the South. "The difficult country through which they passed," laments Srivara, "the scanty food, painful illness, and the torments of hell during lifetime, removed from the minds of the Brahmins the fear of hell. Oppressed by various calamities such as encounter with the enemy, fear of snakes, fierce heat and scanty food, many Brahmins perished on the way, and thus obtained relief." Those, however, who could not leave the Valley "wandered about in Kashmira wearing the dress of the malechas."

Under Zain-ul-Abidin's tolerant rule the Brahmins regained their power and prestige and occupied positions of trust and responsibility in his government. They took an active part in reviving the literary traditions of the land enriching it with the influences from Persian and Arabic science and literature.

The Mughal emperors treated the Brahmins of Kashmir with great respect and with the opening up of the Valley, they found a wider field for their talent. Many Kashmiri Brahmins rose to high political posts, as for instance Pandit Mahadeo and Chaudhri Mahesh in Kashmir and Jai Ram Bhan at Delhi. The Brahmins were no doubt victims of religious persecution during the time of some Mughal governors, Itqad Khan for instance, but by and large they had a peaceful time throughout the Mughal period.

The Afghan rule was particularly harsh on them, but with their literary and political acumen, they produced several eminent administrators who won the confidence of even the most tyrannous of governors. For instance Dila Ram Quli was the chief minister of both Haji Karim Dad Khan and his son, Azad Khan, and "possessed a more liberal disposition than is usually found in an Indian..... His deportment seemed uniformly benevolent to all classes of people. With his companions he was affable and good humoured. He was humane to his domestics and exercised with a reasonable temperance the duties of his office."

All this shows that though the Brahmins had to face very rough times, they weathered the storm with their courage and faith. But this was made possible by the affection and solace they received from the general mass of the population who were Muslims. We have it on the authority of a Brahmin historian that many Muslims gave shelter to a large number of Hindus and kept them concealed in their houses till the dawn of better days."

The most potent reason, however, for their survival as a distinct community was the preaching of the

philosophy of Kashmir Saivism in Kashmiri by the great hermitess, Lalleswari.

Lalleswari - Forerunner of Medieval Reformers

As in the rest of India, the middle of the 14th century was a period of religious and moral fermentation in Kashmir. Buddhism had practically disappeared from the Valley, though we find mention of Buddhist priests and viharas in the later Rajataranginis. Tilakacharya, described as a Buddhist, was a minister of Zain-ul-Abidin. Most of the Buddhist theologians and saints finding the Valley uncongenial, had left for Ladakh and Tibet. The long period of political instability which followed the peaceful and enlightened reign of Avantivarman (855-83 A.D.) was responsible for the ossification of the predominant religion, Shaivism, into elaborate and complicated rituals which dominated all social and cultural activities. Shaktism, born of the love for Durga worship, had degenerated into grotesque forms of rites and ceremonies. Vaishnavism was not a strong element in the religious fabric of the Valley, but in the 11th century it received further nourishment from the teachings of Ramanuja who travelled all the way from Madras to Kashmir to fight Shaivism at its fountain-head. And with the destruction of temples and images by several Hindu kings like Harsha, as well as by Muslim zealots, Hindu worship was driven to the seclusion of the home or of 'natural' (Svayambhu) images - rocks, or ice formations, or springs. Sanskrit became the domain of the learned few, the common man having taken to a form of Prakrit which though retaining its essentials, was yet wholly different from the 'Language of the Gods'.

In this troubled period of political uncertainty and changing social values, the people of the Valley were subjected to the impact of Islam. From a close contact between the two religions and their deep influence on each other, there resulted the evolution of what may be called Medieval Reformers or Mystics.

For more than two hundred years Islam had, in central Asia and Persia, been similarly influenced by the teachings and dogmas of Mahayana Buddhism and Upanishadic philosophy, resulting in the emergence of a cult of Islamic mystics. Fortunately, the new religion entered the Valley in this form, being carried there by enlightened Sufis like Bulbul Shah. With their humanistic approach to religion, they found a ready and sympathetic response from the Kashmiris, already permeated with the teachings of mystic saints and "seers".

For, it was during this period of religious fermentation that a need had been felt for a new approach to religion embracing all creeds and castes appealing to the 'heart' rather than the 'head'. Thanks to its rich religious and philosophic traditions, Kashmir rose to the occasion and produced a number of mystics and saints who by their teachings and their lives of complete self-abnegation were the living embodiments of true religion and morality.

Foremost among them was the great mystic "seer", Lalleshwari, popularly known as Lal Ded (Mother Lalla), who profoundly influenced the thought and life of her contemporaries and whose sayings still touch the Kashmiri's ear, as well as the chords of his heart, and are freely quoted by him as maxims on appropriate occasions. She was born in about the

middle of the 14th century of the Christian Era in the time of Sultan Ala-ud-din. Lall's parents lived at Pandrenthan (ancient Puranadhisthana) some four and a half miles to the south-east of Srinagar. She was married at an early age, but was cruelly treated by her mother-in-law who nearly starved her. This story is preserved in a Kashmiri proverb: Whether they killed a big sheep or a small one, Lalla had always a stone for her dinner - an allusion to her mother-in-law's practice of putting a lumpy stone on her platter and covering it thinly with rice, to make it look quite a big heap to others. And yet she never murmured.

Her father-in-law accidentally found out the truth. He got annoyed with his wife and scolded her. This incident invited more curses on Lalla. Her mother-in-law poisoned the ears of her son with all sorts of stories. Ultimately, the anomalies and cruelties of wordly life led her to renunciation and she discovered liberty in the life of the spirit.

She found her guru in Sidh Srikanth, whom she ultimately excelled in spiritual attainments:

*Gav Tsatha guras Khasithay
Tyuth var ditam Diva
The disciple surpassed the Guru:
God grant me a similar boon*

She pursued Yoga under Sidh Srikanth, until she succeeded in reaching the 'abode of nectar'. But she did not stop there. All around her was conflict and chaos. Her countrymen and women needed her guidance. She had a mission to perform, and well and effectively she did it. Her life and sayings were

mainly responsible in moulding the character of her people and setting up tradition of love and tolerance which characterises them even today.

Eventually she gave up her secluded life and became a wandering preacher. She led a severely ascetic life, clad in the bareness of one who had forsaken comforts, and by example and precept conveyed her teachings to the masses. Like Mira she sang of Siva, the great beloved, and thousands of her followers, Hindus as well as Muslims, committed to memory her famous Vakyas.

There is a high moral teaching which Lalla demonstrated when during her nude state a gang of youthful rowdies were mocking her. A sober-minded cloth vendor intervened and chastised them. On this she asked the vendor for two pieces of ordinary cloth, equal in weight. She put them on either shoulder and continued her wandering. On the way some had salutations for her and some had gibes. For every such greeting she had a knot in the cloth, for the salutations in the piece on the right, and for the gibes in the piece on the left. In the evening after her round, she returned the pieces to the vendor and had them weighed. Neither had, of course, gained or lost by the knots. She thus brought home to the vendor, and her disciples, that mental equipoise should not be shaken by the manner people greeted or treated a person.

So that her teachings and spiritual experiences might reach the masses, she propagated them in their own language. She thus laid the foundations of the rich Kashmiri literature and folklore. More than thirty per cent of the Kashmiri idioms and proverbs derive their origin from her Vakyas.

These Vakyas or sayings are an aggregate of Yoga philosophy and Saivism, expressive of high thought and spiritual truth, precise, apt and sweet. Her quatrains are now rather difficult to understand as the language has undergone so many changes, and references to special Yogic and philosophic terms are numerous therein.

Some of these sayings have been collected and published by Dr. Grierson, Dr. Barnett, Sir Richard Temple and Pandit Anand Koul and apart from the consideration that they explain the Saiva philosophy of Kashmir through the Kashmiri language, they exemplify the synthesis of cultures for which Kashmir has always been noted.

Lalla fills her teachings with many truths that are common to all religious philosophy. There are in it many touches of Vaishnavism, the great rival of Saivism, much that is strongly reminiscent of the doctrines and methods of the Muhammadan Sufis who were in India and Kashmir well before her day, and teachings that might be Christian with Biblical analogies, though Indian's knowledge of Christianity must have been very remote and indirect at her date.

Lalla is no believer in good work in this or in former lives, in pilgrimages or austerities. In one of her sayings she criticises the cold and meaningless way in which religious rituals are performed:

*God does not want meditations and
austerities
Through love alone canst thou reach
the Abode of Bliss.
Thou mayst be lost like salt in water*

Still it is difficult for thee to know God.

All labour, to be effective, must be undertaken without thought of profit and dedicated to Him. Exhorting her followers to stick fast to ideals of love and service to humanity, paying no thought to the praise or condemnation that might follow from their observance, she says:

*Let them jeer or cheer me;
Let anybody say what he likes;
Let good persons worship me with
flowers;
What can any one of them gain I being
pure?
If the world talks ill of me
My heart shall harbour no ill-will:
If am a true worshipper of God
Can ashes leave a stain on a mirror?*

She is a strong critic of idolatory as a useless and even silly "work" and adjures the worshippers of stocks and stones to turn to Yogic doctrines and exercises for salvation:

*Idol is of stone temple is of stone;
Above (temple) and below (idol) are
one;
Which of them wilt thou worship O
foolish Pandit?
Cause thou the union of mind with
Soul.*

She further castigates the fanatical followers of the so-called "religions" in the following apt saying:

*O Mind, why hast thou become
intoxicated at another's expense?
Why hast thou mistaken true for
untrue?
Thy little understanding hath made
thee attached to other's religion;
Subdued to coming and going; to birth
and death.*

But Lalla is not a bigot; she constantly preaches wide and even eclectic doctrines; witness the following and many other instances: "it matters nothing by what name the Supreme is called. He is still the Supreme;" "Be all Lhings to all men;" "the true saint is the servant of all mankind through his humility and loving kindness," "It matters nothing what a man is or what his work of gaining his livelihood may be, so long as he sees the Supreme properly."

She puts no value on anything done without the saving belief in Yogic doctrine and practice, one of the results of which is the destruction of the fruits of all work, good or bad. The aspirant should try to auain perfection in this life. He only requires faith and perseverance:

*Siva is with a fine net spread out
He permeath the mortal coils
If thou whilst living canst not see
Him, how canst thou when dead
Take out Self from Self after pondering*

over it

She is a firm believer in herself. She has become famous and talks of the "wine of her sayings" as something obviously precious, and alludes often to her own mode of life, fully believing she has obtained Release:

*I saw and found I am in everything
I saw God effulgent in everything.
After hearing and pausing see Siva
The House is His alone; Who am I,
Lalla.*

The removal of confusion caused among the masses by the preachings of zealots was the most important object of her mission. Having realised the Absolute Truth, all religions were to her merely paths leading to the same goal:

*Shiv chuy thali thali rozan;
Mo zan Hindu to Musalman.
Truk ay chuk pan panun parzanav,
Soy chay Sahivas sati zaniy zan.
Siva pervades every place and thing;
Do not differentiate between Hindu and
Musalman.
you art intelligent recognise thine own
self;
That is the true acquaintance with God.*

The greatness of Lalla lies in giving the essence of her experiences in the course of her Yoga practices

through the language of the common man. She has shown very clearly the evolution of the human being, theory of nada, the worries and miseries of a jiva and the way to keep them off. The different stages of Yoga with the awakening of the Kundalini and the experiences at the six plexi have been elucidated by her.

Much can, indeed, be said on her work as a poet and more, perhaps, on her work in the spiritual realm. But at a time when the world was suffering from conflict - social, political and economic - her efforts in removing the differences between man and man need to be emphasised.

The composite culture and thought she preached and the Orders she founded was an admixture of the non-dualistic philosophy of Saivism and Islamic Sufism. As long back as the 13th century she preached non-violence, simple living and high thinking and became thus Lalla Arifa for Muhammadans and Lalleshwari for Hindus.

She was thus the first among the long list of saints who preached medieval mysticism which later enwrapped the whole of India. It must be remembered that Ramananda's teaching and that of those that came after him could not have affected Lalla, because Ramananda flourished between 1400 and 1470, while Kabir sang his famous Dohas between 1440 and 1518, and Guru Nanak between 1469 and 1538. Tulsidasa did not come on the scene till 1532 whereas Mira flourished much later.

Later Mystics

The traditions set up by Lalla were kept alive by numerous mystic saints both Hindu and Muslim, in

the centuries following her death. In the 17th century, during the reign of Aurangzeb, there flourished two whose memory is still cherished by the general populace and still command reverence from a large number of Kashmiri Brahmins.

The first is the famous hermitess, Rupa Bhawani alias Alakeswari ('the lady of the lock of hair') so called because she used to leave the hair loose and undone, or Alak-Isvari (incarnation of the Invisible). She was born in 1625 AD. Her father, Pandit Madhav Dhar, a saintly person, lived in Srinagar. He used to have philosophical discussions with a Muslim Faqir, Sayyid Kamal alias Thag Baba, who lived just near his house across the river.

Like Lalleswari, Rupa Bhawani also got married at a young age, and like her again she had to give up the world and live an ascetic's life. Her spiritual preceptor was her father who initiated her into the mysteries of yoga. While living as an ascetic at a village near Srinagar, she came in contact with a Muhammadan mystic, Shah Sadiq Qalandar, with whom she used to have long philosophical discussions.

Her Verses and Sayings composed in the Kashmiri language of her times, have a profound mystic significance. They reveal the influence of both Kashmir Saivism and Islamic Sufism: some explaining her spiritual experiences and teachings of yoga. According to her, non-attachment and dissolution of 'serf' or ego (fana of the Sufis) are the essentials of Realisation:

*Selflessness is the sign of the Selfless;
Bow down at the door of the Selfless.*

The selfless are of the highest authority

The kings of the time and the wearers of the crest and crown. Allowing a glimpse into her own spiritual experiences, she says:

*I dashed down into the nether regions
(of the body)
and brought the vital breath up;
I got its close oust of earth and stones;
They my Kundalini woke up with nada
(loud noise);
I drank wine by the mouth.
I got the vital breath (and) gathered it
within myself.*

Rupa Bhawani introduced a very important social reform, which is still respected and strictly followed. She tabooed bigamy and polygamy in the family of her father, the Dhars. This reform has greater force and higher sanction than a statutory law, and has now nearly become universal among the Hindus of Kashmir.

Rupa Bhawani passed away at a ripe old age of 96 years in the year 1721 AD. Shah Sadiq Qalandar recorded the year in a Persian chronogram, meaning,

*That holy-natured incarnation of the
Unseen
Broke her coil of four elements (i.e.
quitted her lady);
Flew to the highest heaven;*

*With a good-natured heart united with
Bliss.*

While Aurangzeb was enforcing his puritanism and orthodoxy at his court, Sufism and mysticism were still being preached among the general populace by mystics like Sarmad in Delhi and Rishi Pir in Kashmir. Born in 1637 AD of a family of orthodox; Brahmins, Rishi Pir had a religious turn of mind from his very childhood. He found a "spiritual guide" in a famous hermit, Pandit Krishna Kar.

Rishi Pir on account of his saintly nature soon became famous and was revered by all classes of people. He had long sessions of discussions and discourses with Akhund Mullah Shah, the learned tutor of Dara Shikoh who had built his monastery on the southern slope of the Hari Parbat hill.

Rishi Pir was called by his followers "*padshah har du jehan*" the "Emperor of two worlds". This, Shikoh's tutor, alarmed Aurangzeb, particularly when he had to face revolts raised by religious leaders in different parts of the country. He, therefore, sent order to his governor, Saif Khan, to put him under arrest.

Whereas the Hindus claim that he appeared in a dream to Aurangzeb the same night demanding the annulment of the imperial order, the Muslim version is that some of his ministers assured the emperor that Rishi Pir had no political axe to grind but was simply a holy man to whom worldly power was repugnant. Howsoever it may be, the emperor cancelled his orders and thenceforth Rishi Pir carried on his religious mission peacefully.

Aurangzeb seems to have been struck with remorse at his cruel action in condemning Sarmad, the famous Sufi of his time, to the gallows. When in 1665 he visited Kashmir, Rishi Pir comforted him by his assurance that exalted souls like that of Sarmad did neither care for death, nor bear any sense of grievance against those who harmed them.

Many miracles are attributed to Rishi Pir. But this was sharply criticised by his contemporary, Rupa Bhawani, who viewed them with disfavour as tending to show personal and wordly aggrandizement. Rishi Pir was humbled and desisted thenceforth from indulging in this cheap way of winning popular applause. He died at the age of 60 in the year 1697. His son also turned a recluse and was affectionately known among the people as Rahnawab.

During the Afghan rule too, Kashmir had a number of Muslim and Hindus saints, who with their comforting words and sometimes even by their active intercession with the governors on behalf of the people reduced the pitch of fury of many an unscrupulous ruler. Jiwan Sahib, for instance, cast a spell of devotion on the hardhearted tyrant, Azad Khan. The latter had a superstitious awe of the *faqir*, who many a time admonished him not to indulge in wanton cruelty. Jiwan Sahib lived at Rainawari, the eastern suburb of Srinagar, and led a life of austere meditation and penance. Thousands of people used to flock to him for solace and listen attentively to his discourses, the burden of which was simple living and high thinking.

Influence of Islam on Hinduism and Vice Versa

We have now a fair picture of the deep influence

that Islam had on orthodox Hinduism. Long before a Kashmir had a Muslim ruler the new religion had penetrated into the Valley, its missionaries having effected the conversion of most of the lower castes. The denunciation of idolatory and caste system by Islam was no doubt a major factor in making an accomplished king like Harsa to spoliage temples and desecrate the images. Hindus, particularly of lower castes, also seem to have discarded many of the rigid rituals and practices preached by orthodox Brahmins. Bemoans Jonaraja: "As the wind destroys the trees and the locusts the *shali* crop, so did the Yavanas destroy the usages of Kashmira." And again, "the kingdom of Kashmira was polluted by the evil practices of the malechas." Srivara, the historian who followed him, speaks in the same strain. He complains that many of the misfortunes of Kashmir were due to the changes in customs and manners of the people. In course of time, the lower castes gave up the performance of prescribed ceremonies, and accepted Islam.

Even the Brahmins, who retained the Hindu religion and caste, could not escape the influence of the new religion. A majority of them in order to retain the government jobs, took to the study of Persian which in a few centuries became so popular with the Pandit class that they composed hymns and prayers to their deities in the Persian language rather than in Sanskrit. There were changes in dress and manners.

Lalla, for instance, was critical of the caste system and idol worship.

But if Islam was responsible in effecting profound changes in the Hindu rites, rituals, and belief in caste and idol worship, it could not escape a

transformation in several of its own beliefs and practices. The new converts could not make a complete break with the past, and continued to follow some of their old rites and rituals. Even though Islam, for instance, denounced the caste system, they carried on with their old caste rites in marriage and other social customs. They also continued to celebrate their festivals of *Gana-chakra*, *Chaitra*, *Vyathtruwah*, *Sri Panchami*. Many of them did not totally give up idol worship and continued to have reverence for their old places of worship and pilgrimage.

This had also a profound effect on the rulers, particularly the Sultans, who in deference to the wishes of the people, adopted some of the practices of their former religion. Most of these Sultans had Hindu wives who, though converted to Islam, could not fail to influence their husbands and children with their former religious beliefs. It is, therefore, no wonder that some Sultans had faith in the efficacy of *havens* or sacrificial ceremonies of the Hindus; in visiting Hindu *tirthas*, and in allowing Brahmin priests to officiate at several functions, fair example, the time of coronation, or birth of the heir-apparent.

A unique practice among the Kashmiri Muslims is the singing in chorus "Darood" or praises of the various aspects of God in Persian after offering *namaz* in the mosque. Singing hymns in chorus is prohibited in mosques, but the converts prevailed upon Shah Hamadan to waive this prohibition in their case as they were used to offer worship in this manner in temples before conversion. The Rishis of Kashmir had been greatly influenced by the Hindu religion. Like the Hindu Rishis or recluses, they believed in withdrawing from the world, practicing

celebracy, undergoing penances in caves and jungles, refraining from killing birds and animals for food or eating even freshly picked vegetables and fruits. They lived on wild vegetables and endeavoured to follow the Yogic practices of the Hindus.

"Popular Islam in Kashmir thus became diluted with foreign elements, and this character it has retained until today."

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